



## **Parent-Child Communication and the Prevalence of Sexual Molestation among Adolescents**

**F. Lanre-Babalola<sup>1\*</sup> and O. A. Oke<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Behavioural Studies, College of Management and Social Sciences, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.*

### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author FLB designed the study, wrote the protocol and first draft of the manuscript. Author OAO performed the statistical analyses and managed the literature searches. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sexual molestation is a complex life experience, not a disorder or diagnosis. The diversity of behaviours included in sexual abuse, along with differences in the age and gender of the child victim, the nature of the relationship between the child and the perpetrator or molesters or abusers, and the frequency and duration of the child abuse or child molestation. This study examined the prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation among adolescents' students in Nigeria. Also investigated the influence of socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, and residential location on the prevalence of sexual molestation as well as their history with the aim of understanding how to resolve the problem associated with it. The Study design was Cross-sectional survey design. The University of Lagos, Akoka and Redeemer's University Osun State, Southwestern Nigeria was the location of the study. The study population comprised of students in Redeemer's University, Ede Osun-State and the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos. The 200 questionnaires were distributed randomly among students. The data derived through the administered questionnaire was analyzed using frequency, percentage and t-test. Results showed that over 20% of adolescents have experienced sexual molestation of one or the other, of it was also discovered that male respondents have a higher experience of sexual molestation than female

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [lanrebabalolaf@run.edu.ng](mailto:lanrebabalolaf@run.edu.ng);

respondents among adolescents ( $t= 1.02$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $P>0.05$ ). A large number of parents have discussions concerning sexual molestation with their children. The study also revealed that there is a significant difference between adolescents who live with their parents and those who do not on the experience of sexual molestation ( $t= 2.42$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). Adolescents in Nigeria in experience one form of sexual molestation or the other. It was therefore recommended that Parents should be informed that male children are also prone to be sexually molested, In addition, attention should be paid to close relatives as living in same residence with adolescents does not automatically prevent sexual molestation.

*Keywords: Patterns; adolescents; information; prevalence; sexual molestation; parent/child communication.*

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sexual molestation is forced sexual activity, with molesters using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims without their consent and even in some cases unconsciously. Most victims and molesters are familiar each other. The way victims react to sexual abuse or molestation vary, it include shock, fear or disbelief. Long-term symptoms include anxiety, fear or post-traumatic stress disorder. Adolescence is the span in which human growth and maturation that occurs after childhood through adulthood, it also defined through the ages of 10 to 19 [1]. An adolescent is a human being who is between the ages of 10 to 19. Adolescence is a life-stage through which a person who is basically called an adolescent is both disoriented and is exposed to discovery [2,3]. Adolescence transitional period is often associated with issues of independence and self-identification, many adolescents experience difficulty in making choices related to school work, sexuality drugs, alcohol consumption, a distinctive social life [4,5] Sexual molestation involves a range of indecent or sexual activities between an adult and a child [6]. Millions of Nigerian adolescents face the problem in appalling circumstances. This problem not only affects the survival of the children but creates a formidable obstacle for the development of the adolescents [7,8]. The problem of sexual molestation is a disturbing issue in Nigerian society. If the problem is not critically addressed, it may create a lot of damage to society. In some cases, these molestations take place not only at home and undertaken by persons known to and trusted by the adolescents, but also in the school where the children or adolescents spend a greater part of his/her early life [9]. Incidences of molestation abound in schools in tertiary level and, sometimes, in ways unknown to the school authorities it at the same time, pose serious dangers to students at the same time could have

damaging and far more consequences on the life of the individual. Residues of sexual molestation in some cases have implications in behaviour throughout the life span has effects on individuals in the university; one common misconception is that among molested adolescents will grow to become molesters themselves [10].

A general misconception about sexual molestation is to assume only females are victims of sexual molestation, the reality is that sexual molestation is experienced by both sexes. This study seeks to find out the prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation experienced by adolescents with a view to identifying factors that predispose adolescents to sexual molestation in order to suggest ways of avoiding or reducing the incidence.

The specific objectives of the study are to assess the prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation among adolescents, assess parent/adolescents' communication on sexual molestation and identify the socio-economic correlates of sexual molestation among adolescents.

A study of this nature is essential because it will help provide insight into the effect of sexual molestation on adolescents in tertiary institutions. The outcome of the study will give the society or family institution the opportunity to be aware of the general causes of sexual molestation in tertiary schools and the best way to manage them. In this study, different categories of people will benefit they include academia, government, individuals etc. Also, This study will enable the government to embark on programs and seminar presentations and also take adequate steps in eliminating sexual molestation in Nigeria educational institutions.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

### 1.1.1 Freud's seduction theory

Freud's seduction theory was a hypothesis posited in the mid-1890s by Sigmund Freud, according to this theory, repressed memory of an early childhood sexual abuse or molestation experience was the essential precondition for hysterical or obsession symptoms, with the addition of an active sexual experience up to the age of eight for the latter. Freud's seduction theory emphasizes the causative impact of nurture: the shaping of the mind by experience. This theory held that hysteria and obsession neurosis are caused by repressed memories of infantile sexual abuse. Infantile sexual abuse, the root of all neurosis, is the premature introduction of sexuality into the experience of the child. Trauma creates effects and thoughts that simply cannot be integrated [11]. The adult who had a normal, non-traumatic childhood is able to contain and assimilate sexual feelings into a continuous sense of self. Freud proposed that adults who experienced sexual abuse as a child suffers from unconscious memories and feelings incompatible with the central mass of thoughts and feelings that constitute his or her experience. Psychic disorders are a direct consequence of experiences that cannot be assimilated. An unconscious memory of infantile sexual abuse was a necessary condition for the development of certain disorders, hysteria in particular. But another condition had to be met: There had to be an unconscious memory of the abuse.

### 1.1.2 Behavioural theory

Behavioural hypothesis clarified degenerate sexual conduct as a learned condition. Laws and Marshall [12] introduced a hypothetical model of sexually degenerate conduct that depicted how sexually degenerate premiums might be scholarly through the same components by which ordinary sexuality is found out. The model is separated into two sections: the securing forms and the support forms. The model embraced the position that maladaptive conduct can result from quantitative and subjective mixes of accesses that were naturally efficient, entirely decided and ordinary in source. Along these lines, freak sexual inclinations and cognition were procured by the same instruments by which other people adapted all the more routinely acknowledged methods of sexual expression.

## 1.2 Correlates of Sexual Molestation

Sexual molestation is a complex life experience, not a disorder or diagnosis [13]. It involves any sexual conduct or contact or activities of an adult or significantly older child with or upon a child for the purposes of the different sexual gratification of the perpetrator or molester. Sexual molestation and exploitation can be perpetrated on children of all ages, from infancy to adolescence. A child or youth can be sexually molested or abused by a parent, sibling, extended family member, caregiver or guardian, others known to the family, neighbours or a stranger. Regardless of whom the perpetrator is, abuse is a misuse of power and a violation of trust [14,15].

Sexual abuse has been linked with a range of problem outcomes during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Adults who were victims of child sexual abuse often fear sex, distrust their sex partners, have decreased sexual drive and have multiple superficial sexual relationships. Some children who were sexually abused have been found to engage in sexualized behaviour (e.g., a typical sexual play with dolls and playmates, or excessive masturbation) and have a precocious interest in sexual matters. Somewhat surprisingly, studies [16,17,18,19] have focused on the relationship between child sexual abuse and sexual behavior during adolescence, the developmental stage when experimentation with sexual behaviour and relationships typically occurs.

The trend for sexual molestation or abuse to covary with disturbed gender, parental income, living environment [20], family backgrounds and other forms of victim characteristics creates profound difficulties when it comes to interpreting correlation studies. In some cases, the adverse outcomes attributed to sexual molestation or abuse may be related as much to the disrupted childhood backgrounds and adolescent's residences, in the context of which the abuse arose, as to the sexual abuse itself.

Lo [21] explored public attitudes regarding sexual abuse and reported that sex and age are very important variables when it comes to decisions and attributions about sexual abuse. In addition, "understanding the influence of the perpetrator,'s sex as well as the victim's may help explain varying reactions to child sexual abuse" [22]. Carballo-Dieguez [23] explored the perceptions of sexual abuse among adolescents 'who are

male who had experienced such behaviours. The research includes 100 Latino men, predominately gay, who experienced childhood sexual abuse with an older partner. In the study, the 100 participants were asked if they considered their experiences to be sexual abuse with 41 responding no and 59 responding yes. Participants who said yes, felt that they were young, physically forced, physically hurt, threatened, and emotionally hurt when the event happened to them. Also, they were more prone to having unprotected anal sex, drinking more alcohol and having more sex partners [24].

A study of men and women undergraduate students from two universities in the southwestern United States showed that women subjects predicted that peers disclosing the history of sexual abuse had poorer health and interpersonal and adjustment, but had strengths in coping and likeability [25]. Additionally, there have been many studies [26,27,28,29] that focused upon understanding college students' perceptions of sexual abuse. Sexual molestation can come in many forms, in order to better understand the wide range of perception and knowledge adolescents have about molestation that can occur, it is better to include definitions of different types of rape and sexual molestation, as well as other kinds of molestation that often arise hand-in-hand with sexual abuse.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Participants**

A cross sectional survey design was employed in the study. The population comprised of male and female students selected from two universities in southwestern Nigeria. Questionnaires were distributed to adolescents Redeemers University Ede, State of Osun and University of Lagos, Akoka. A simple random sampling technique was adopted while a purposive sampling technique was adopted to select one hundred respondents from each institution.

### **2.2 Measures**

A questionnaire was designed using Halpérin et al. [30] questionnaire on child sexual abuse. The structured questionnaire used for data collection contained 32 items which had 2 sections. Section A captured demographics, section B captured prevalence, patterns and perception of sexual molestation among adolescents.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

Collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS pack 23). Descriptive statistic (frequency count and percentages) were used to organize, summarize and describe the demographic characteristics of respondents. Further, T-test was used to assess whether the mean of two groups are statistically different from each other and the relationship that exists among the variables, thereby making valid inferences and conclusion.

### **2.4 Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

The following table is a presentation and analysis of the background characteristics of respondents like sex, age, residence pattern, university of study etc. This will be followed by molestation experience and surrounding factors.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The Table 1 shows that 51.8% (103) are between ages 15-20 years old, 35.2% (70) of respondent were aged between 21-25, 13.1% (26) had the lowest level of respondents and they were aged 26-30. There was equality in the distribution of the questionnaires between male and female gender which was 50% (100) for males and for females 50% (100) to a total of 200 questionnaires distributed. There was also equality in the administration of questionnaires in the various study areas Redeemers University respondents were 50% (100) and University of Lagos respondents were 50% (100) to the total of 200 respondents. This means that students who are adolescents were more involved in the study than students who are young adults. In addition, a large number of students 73.5% do not live with their parents.

### **3.2 Analysis of Objectives**

Research Objectives 1: Assess the prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation among respondents

Generally, the prevalence of experienced sexual molestation is below average. Respondents reported different types of sexual molestation. On

average, 20.9% of respondents have experienced one form of sexual molestation or the other. Molestation experiences vary from being forced by an adult or an older child to watch pornographic pictures, drawing, films etc to being forcefully fondled (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole and or their genitals). As much as

49 students have been forced to submit to full sexual intercourse with penetration (rape) by an older child or an adult. In addition, 42 respondents reported that they have experienced an adult or older child having his or her fingers or an object introduced in their bodies.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage( %)
15 -20 years	103	51.8
21-25 years	70	35.2
26-30 years	26	13.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	100	50.0
Female	100	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>School</b>		
University of Lagos	100	50.0
Redeemer's University	100	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Place of Residence</b>		
With parents	53	26.5
Not with parents	147	73.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2. Prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation among respondents**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Being Forced to watch masturbation</b>		
No	155	77.5
Not sure	5	2.5
Yes	40	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Being forced by adult or older child forced to watch pornographic pictures, drawings, films etc.</b>		
No	156	78.0
Not sure	5	2.5
Yes	39	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Being fondled forcefully (caresses, rubs, kisses on the whole and genitals)</b>		
No	156	78.0
Not sure	5	2.5
Yes	39	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Ever experienced full sexual intercourse with penetration</b>		
No	148	74.0
Not sure	3	1.5
Yes	49	24.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Respondents' submitting to fingering in private parts</b>		
No	155	77.5
Not sure	3	1.5
Yes	42	21.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 3. Respondents' experience of parental/child discussion on sexual molestation**

<b>Do your parent talk to you about sexual molestation</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
No	91	45.5
Not exactly	7	3.5
Yes	102	51.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Respondents reported information on sexual molestation</b>		
Not Adequate	13	6.5
Not sure	3	1.5
Adequate	184	92.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4. Independent t-test of gender difference on the experience of sexual molestation**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
Male	100	7.41	3.03	198	1.02	>0.05
Female	100	6.98	2.93			

Research objectives 2: Assess the level of parent/child communication on Sexual Molestation

A reasonable number (51.0%) of respondents' parents have discussions with their children concerning sexual molestation. However, 45.5% of parents do not talk to their children about sexual molestation. 92.0% perceive they have adequate information on sexual molestation.

### 3.3 Test of Hypothesis

#### Hypothesis one:

Ho- There will be no significant between gender and sexual molestation among adolescents.

H1: There will be a significant difference between gender and sexual molestation among adolescents.

The t-test analysis of gender on the experience of sexual molestation and the results indicate

that there is no significant difference between male and female on the experience of sexual molestation ( $t= 1.02$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $P>0.05$ ). However, male respondents have a higher experience of sexual molestation than female respondents among adolescents. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted.

#### Hypothesis two:

Ho: Adolescents who live with their parents will not be significantly higher in the experience of sexual molestation than adolescents who do not.  
H1: Adolescents who live with their parents will be significantly higher in the experience of sexual molestation than adolescents who do not.

The t-test analysis of adolescents' place of a resident on the experience of sexual molestation and the results indicate that there is a significant difference between adolescents who live with their parents and those who do not on the experience of sexual molestation ( $t= 2.42$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). That is, those who live with their

**Table 5. Independent t-test of the place of residence and adolescents' experience of sexual molestation**

<b>Living with your parents?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>P</b>
Yes	53	8.03	3.17	198	2.42	<0.05
No	146	6.98	2.87			

parents show a higher experience of sexual molestation than those who do not. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The study aimed at examining the prevalence and patterns of sexual molestation among adolescents, assess the level of parent /child communication on sexual molestation and identify the influence of the socio-economic correlates of sexual molestation experience. The result from the administered questionnaire to adolescents revealed that most of the people who participated in this study are between ages 15-20 years old; an indication that students who are adolescents were more involved in the study than students who are young adults. Majority of students do not live with their parent's respondents compare to those who live with their parents. Majority of the respondent's parent have discussions with their children about sexual molestation. But about a high percentage of parents of students who were involved in this study do not talk to their children about sexual molestation.

Surprisingly, findings indicated that the majority of the male respondents have a higher experience of sexual molestation than female respondents. This finding opposes one meta-analysis of the various studies on victim prevalence found that the overall prevalence of male children who are sexually abused is 13 per cent, whereas the prevalence of female children who are sexually abused is 30 to 40 per cent [31,32]. These findings states that female gender experience more sexual molestation than the male gender. This study also identified three significant explanations as to why there is such a wide range in adolescent sexual victimization rates, including the number of screen questions used to identify abuse victims, the size of the sample, and the years in which the studies were conducted.

According to the second hypothesis, majority of adolescents who live with their parents experience more sexual molestation than and those who do not on the experience of sexual molestation. That is, parents who have children living with them are somewhat careless about the possibilities of sexual molestation in their environment.

Anyone can be sexually molested, regardless of their gender, size, strength, appearance or

sexual orientation and knowledge. The vast majority of the literature or discussion about sexual molestation or abuse discussed from the perspective of the female victim, and as such, there has been "feminization of victimization" [33]. Until very recently, there has been very little in the mass media about male victims of sexual molestation, and this absence leads to a downplay of the prevalence of sexual molestation.

The findings agree with Sapp & Vandeven [34] that sexual molestation on adolescents can result in many mental and physical side effects that have the potential to place the survivor in a life-threatening situation. Both women and men can be affected by sexual abuse they experienced during childhood, but women tend to report more profound trauma than men, but in recent times according to this findings reports that male gender is more sexually molested than the females. Regardless of the gender of the survivor, researchers have found one of the most traumatic experiences is the act of being penetrated. Studies also show that the majority of sexual molestation crimes are committed by men that the survivor knows but from these findings, females are more of the molesters to the male gender.

#### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that overall prevalence rates of sexual abuse among adolescents are high among male adolescents. The sexual molestation among adolescents is a form of maltreatment that provokes reactions of danger and incomprehensibility in all cultures. Sexual molestation might not have been as prominent as a few decades ago when molestation was rarely spoken of, hidden issues may still prevent victims from reaching out to authorities to reveal the molestation or abuse they suffer. To effectively prevent sexual molestation global preventive approaches, targeting personal, family and societal conditions, need to be explored and validated so to protect the next generations of children and youth from sexual victimization.

After a detailed examination and balancing of the data obtained from the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents put more effort into focusing on the male child, further educate them about the possibility of them been molested.

2. Schools should welcome adolescents or children active involvement in activities that would improve their cognitive ability.
3. The government should have orientation programs for parents, guidance, and caregivers to let them know about their contribution and how they can reduce sexual molestation.
4. It is recommended for future research that this research study is replicated on a larger population, it would also be beneficial to do a longitudinal study on this population and this might provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between populations.
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### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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